

Quick Facts

About... Mononucleosis

What is mononucleosis?

Mononucleosis is a disease caused by the Epstein-Barr virus (EBV), a member of the herpesvirus group. Infections may go unrecognized in young children, whereas, in older children and young adults, clinical illness with the typical signs and symptoms are more common.

How is mononucleosis spread?

Mononucleosis is spread by direct contact with the saliva of an infected person.

What are the symptoms of mononucleosis?

Symptoms can include fever, exudative pharyngitis, swollen glands, and atypical lymphocytes in the blood. The spectrum of disease is extremely variable. An enlarged spleen is also typical in cases among adolescents and young adults. Occasionally, infection may be accompanied by a rash, which is more likely to occur in people treated with ampicillin. Complications may include aseptic meningitis, encephalitis, or Guillian-Barre syndrome. Fatigue lasting a few weeks may follow the infection.

How is mononucleosis diagnosed?

Physicians use blood tests to diagnose mononucleosis in symptomatic individuals. The finding of greater than 10 percent atypical lymphocytes along with a positive heterophil antibody test result is considered diagnostic of acute infection.

How is mononucleosis treated?

- There is no specific treatment for mononucleosis.
- Some interventions to assist in relief of symptoms include:
 - Get plenty of bed rest.
 - Drink lots of water and fruit juices to relieve fever and prevent dehydration.

- Gargle with salt water to relieve sore throat.
- Consider over-the-counter pain relievers. Do not give aspirin to children under the age of 16 years.

Avoid sports activities for at least a month after symptoms have resolved because of the increased risk of a ruptured spleen.

How can mononucleosis be prevented?

Mononucleosis can be prevented by using respiratory etiquette, frequent hand washing, and by avoiding saliva sharing activities.

For additional information on mononucleosis, please visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/ebv.htm>

Mononucleosis is not a reportable disease in Indiana so there are no communicable disease reports available for this disease.

Last reviewed August 15, 2011 by ISDH Respiratory Epidemiologist